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SUBJECT: SUCCESSFUL VISIT OF NASA ADMINISTRATOR SEAN O'KEEFE FEBRUARY 28-29 TO GUATEMALA

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1. Summary. NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe had a very successful visit to Guatemala during his brief six-country trip to Latin America. In Guatemala he met with GOG officials in the Peten where NASA briefed on environmental/climate change and archeological programs carried out through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), toured Tikal, hosted a dinner for GOG officials, and departed early Sunday, 2/29, for Manaus, Brazil. End Summary.

2. Administrator Sean O'Keefe of NASA, met by the Hamilton, stopped February 28 in Guatemala, s Peten department, which includes the entire Maya Biosphere, during his brief six-country visit to the Mesoamerica Biological Corridor. The NASA party gave presentations to the new Guatemalan government on the work they are doing under an MOU with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD)(Spanish acronym). Minister of Environment Mario Dary, who is also the President Pro Tempore of the CCAD; Minister of Agriculture Alvaro Aguilar; Executive Secretary to the President Eduardo Gonzalez; head of CONAP (the protected areas council that oversees the Maya Biosphere) Ana Luisa Noguera; Governor of Peten Manuel Barquin; Vice Minister of Agriculture for Peten Erasmo Sanchez; head of the National Commission on Science and Technology Hector Centeno, among others, participated in the briefing, held in the Jungle Lodge at the Tikal archeological site.

3. The NASA briefings covered the NASA/CCAD SERVIR project (partially funded by USAID and the World Bank), that will help policy makers, scientists, educators, etc., through data and computer models monitor and forecast ecological changes, respond to natural disasters, and better understand both natural and human induced effects on the regional climate. The briefing also reviewed the use of satellite imaging to locate probable Mayan archeological sites and reveal facts about the Mayan civilization, s land use that could be applicable to today, s climate change issues. They explained the aerial survey mission (AirSAR), which is taking place March 2-9 over selected environmentally important areas of Mexico through Panama. Its data will have higher resolution than the current satellite images.

4. Presentation highlights: (1) The announcement that a website with SERVIR data will be online within a few months. The website will offer real-time satellite images of Central America for use by government decision makers, scientists, schools, etc. (2) Project imagery also revealed a close correlation between a particular color variation and archaeological sites that were previously undiscovered, suggesting that there are probably many Mayan archeological sites still to be located and studied. The data suggests the Mayans sustained a high density of population in what are currently inhospitable areas. (3) Perhaps most stunning was the discovery by American archeologist Bill Saturno of the first Mayan mural found since 1946 and one which pre-dates by 800 years the previous best estimates of the height of Mayan civilization and art, moving the estimates from 800 A.D. to 0 A.D.

5. After the briefing, the NASA party and some GOG officials toured Tikal led by Guatemalan Archeologist Roxy Ortiz, who works at the San Bartolo site. The President's Executive Secretary Eduardo Gonzalez left with his party. They

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scheduled NASA's briefing into a fact-finding day trip to Peten to learn more about competing plans for managing the area of the Mirador archeological site (Cuenca Mirador or Mirador Basin), which hosts the largest Mayan pyramid yet discovered and an extensive area of archeological interest.

6. The visit was rounded off by a dinner at the Camino Real Tikal Hotel hosted by Administrator O'Keefe and attended by the Hamilton, the Ministers of Agriculture and Environment, head of CONAP, Vice Minister of Agriculture, Executive Secretary of CCAD, and others. Administrator O'Keefe left

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Sunday morning for Manaus, Brazil.

17. Comment: The visit was very productive and deeply impressed the GOG. It was a superb opportunity for the new government to see what cooperation with the USG on science and environmental issues can offer. The briefings, dinner and informal chats at Tikal and at breakfast helped clarify a number of key issues for both the GOG and USG. For instance, the Minister of Agriculture wanted to know why his ministry was financing part of AirSAR (funds approved by the discredited Portillo administration). NASA officials explained the project's agricultural applications and also allayed GOG concerns that data to be provided on the SERVIR website would help the illegal antiquities trade find sites. Embassy and AID staff were able to get valuable information on the Cuenca Mirador project, which is a highly visible, highly controversial project for both the U.S. and Guatemala.

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